

Open Learning Communities for Development: Revisiting the Gender Dimensions

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge systems are undergoing a meaningful shift beyond service provision to shaping a new landscape of learning opportunities. The transition from conventional telecentres to knowledge centres should create “diverse, layered, interconnected open learning communities”. Ariyabandu (2009) described the transformation of conventional telecentres into more development-oriented knowledge networks for improving livelihoods and attaining sustainable development. Knowledge hubs are emerging as the intermediaries between telecentres and knowledge networks.

The undoubted potential of open learning communities must be viewed in the light of the reality of gender-based inequalities. Schnuttgen (1997) identified some notions of open learning communities (OLCs) indicating shifts towards gender-aware learning systems with learning as relationship building. Revisiting the gender dimensions will enable practitioners to bridge the gender divide which superimposes itself additively on the existing ‘digital divide’. Kanwar (2007) emphasizes that the digital divide is also a gender divide as evident from the differential access to and use of ICTs. Hafkin & Taggart (2001) have highlighted the fact that most women in developing countries sink into the deepest part of the digital divide. Women are further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share. As Gurumurthy (2006) suggests, the fundamental issue in reaching poor women is creating a set of technology-mediated services and products that allow women to be part of emerging opportunities.

Although learning may enable mobility, new alignments and identifications, a contrasting reality suggests that women may not be able to fully exercise choice. Open learning communities cannot succeed unless they acknowledge and celebrate differences, seeking to create and construct pluralistic environments which promote and foster these differences (Jain 1997). Conceptual models which emphasize notions of co-evolution (learning and changing together) and partnership between open learning communities (OLCs) need to be developed and expanded.

RECREATING AND RESHAPING SPACES AND RESOURCES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER EQUITY

Documented experiences of telecentres from Ghana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Uganda and South Africa (Latchem & Walker 2001) discuss limitations and constraints while illustrating their potential for distance learning applications. The Common Service Centres being set up across India are a major contribution to bridging the digital divide with the Government rolling out 83,569 centres in rural India (CSC-India 2010). The IGNOU community college experience lends itself to creation of a well-organized network of open learning communities already engaged in provision of ODL in India at the grassroots.

Barriers encountered by women in accessing telecentres have been widely studied across Africa and Asia (Islam & Hasan 2009, UNCTAD 2007, CSDMS 2008, Gurumurthy 2006, Green & Trevor-Deutsch 2002, Hafkin & Taggart 2001).

Based on extensive research and experiences documented of the gender divide, a gender analysis framework can be developed. Some of the key questions which need to be asked, answered and addressed include:

1. Who occupies, owns and controls the physical space, virtual space or mindspace? Can women explore, share and grow in a “safe”, non-threatening space?
2. What are the text, sub-text and context?
 - How is knowledge discovered and meaning created? Are women consulted as repositories of knowledge? Is their indigenous knowledge valued? Are they involved in collating the knowledge and enabled to socially appropriate the process of meaning creation? Do men contribute to this process?
 - Is the knowledge freely shared and modified by individual women in groups? Are the women free to interact with men in public spaces or are the spaces “women-only” and “outsider-proof”?
 - What are the implications of content construction? Does the content propagate gender stereotypes/ biases? Does it promote positive imagery and representation?
 - Do women have the freedom to search for creative alternatives, authenticity and voice?
 - Is the learning environment situated and pluralistic redefining context, texture and motivation?
 - Are there opportunities for learning together – building social relationships, negotiating differences, resolving conflicts?
 - Is the content open? Free or paid? Who owns it? Who uses it? Who disseminates it? Women, men or both? Alternatively, are these functions performed by NGOs or government agencies?
 - Are information intermediaries involved to translate and interpret content? Are they local women or adolescent girls?
 - Do women engage with knowledge building or are they merely recipients of information?
 - Which content is relevant for women or men or both women and men? Is content gender disaggregated according to need?
 - Is the learning relevant to regional/local/individual context? Are the applications, creation and repackaging of knowledge and information sensitive to local gender relations? Is it gender-neutral, gender-specific or gender-transformative?
 - Does the community use its embedded potential to challenge or alter existing norms and knowledge bases?
 - How can women themselves facilitate meaningful, gender-aware, inter-generational, cross-cultural interactions within and across communities?
 - Are women trained to manage fluid open systems in perpetual flux? Can
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 ýlýcýsýwýmýnýsýkýoýlýdýeýaýdýcýnýrýbýtýoýsýaýeýnýtývýtýeý ýrývýtýdýtýdý
 ýoýeýeý,ýwýmýnýcýnýaýdýhývý ýlýýdýaý ýmýoýtýný ýoýeýý ýnýoýaýiýnýsýsýeýsý
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ýpýnýlýaýnýný ýoýmýnýtýeý ýhýuýdýpýoýoýeýbýtý ýrýuý ýný
 ýnýiýýuýlýlýaýnýný;ýcýnýtýuýtýýdývýtýaý ýný ýhýrýdývýtýsýoýsý ýhý ýiý ýfýlýfýlýný ýeýrýiýgýý
 ýoýcýeýtý ýoýiýlýlýaýnýný ýaýiýaý ýýýiýrýiýkýný ýoýiýlýcýpýtýlý ýnýoýmýlýlýfýlýný
 ýeýrýiýgýaýdýtýeýýeý ýfýqýaýýýlýlýaýnýný ýoývýtýaýiýný ýBýlýsýbýaýaýiýný&ýDýnýeý
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ýeýdýrýcýnýcýeýtýtýtýoý ýaýeý ýnýiýfýrýeý ýeýdýrýaýaýýýý ýsýpýrýýuýaýlý ýnýeýeýtýný
 ýnýtýeýcýnýeýtýoý ýpýnýlýaýnýný ýoýmýnýtýeý.ýTýý ýrýcýsý ýaý ýoýtýrýdývýtýpýeýtýoý ýoýlý
 ýoýrývýtý ýeýdýrýsýeýýiý ýeýrýiýgýpýoýeýsýsý ýnýwýeýgý ýný ýeýrýiýgýsýsýeýsýý ý
 ýeýrýiýgýcýmýuýýýý(ýcýnýtýgýný1ý9ýý) ýrýgýaýmýsýfýcýsýný ýxýlýsývýtý ýnýwýmýnýwýtý
 ýiýtýeýýiýrýcýiýnýwýtý ýeý ýeýeýrýlýtývýtý ýoýmýný ýnýoývýtý ýoýhýwýmýnýaýdýmýnýý
 ýeýlýcýýgýoý ýxýsýýgýgýnýeý ýeýaýiýný ýsýiýhýrýný ýnýbýýdýný ýeýdýrýeýuýlýtý ýnýoýeý
 ýeýrýiýgýcýmýuýýýýsý ýuýhýýiýrýcýiýný ýaý ýeýpýtý ýeýoýsýrýcý ýný ýeýeýýeýgýnýeý
 ýeýaýiýný.ýOý ýhý ýtýeý ýaýdý ýxýeýiýnýeý ýnýsývýtýrýlýdývýtýpýný ýoýnýrýeý
 ýdýoýaýeýsýnýýiýýýýý ýuýtýrýlýcýnýtýaýnýsýoýeýaýýgýtý ýiýý ýnýeýaýtýoý ýfýwýmýnýwýtý
 ýeý ýnýpýbýý ýpýcýsý(ýaýaýýeý ýlý2ý0ý,ýCýDýSý2ý0ý,ýGýrýmýrýhý ý0ý6ý
 ýWýýeýoýeý ýný ýiýtýnýeýlýaýnýný ýOýLý ýsýhýýeý ýsýaýhýrýýgýrýoý
 ýeýdýrýeýuýlýtý,ýrýaýýýsýmýýýbý ýuýtý ýiýfýrýný ýMýaýaý2ý0ýý ýnýeýpýsýtýoý
 ýfýtýeýgýnýeýeý ýaýeýoý ýhý ýeýrýeý ýoýuýaýiýnýwýuýdýbý ýeýdýdý ýnýoýaýiýnýý ýhý ýeý
 ýoýsýfýýiýnýlý ýnýeýrýgýtý,ýaýtýcýlýtý ýný ýnýlýzý ýhý ýeýdýrýcýnýtýuýtýoý ýnýwýýhýOýLýý
 ýeýýeýeý.ýWýýeýtýeýaýsýmýtýoý ýsýtýaý ýoýeý ýný ýiýlý ýrý ýiýaývýtýaýeý,ýtýý ýaý ýoý
 ýeýuýýeýsýlýýýýýuý.ýNývýtýhýlýsý,ýýý ýuýtýbý ýmýhýsýzýdýtýaý ýnýeýaýhýeýeýtýoý
 ýoýsýsýoýlý ýoý ýeýeýuýtýdýwýtý ýhý ýaýgýnýlýzýtýoý ýfýwýmýnýaýdýgýrýsýdýeýtý ýaýrýaýcýaý
 ýtýuýtýrýsýaýdýýsýýuýýiýný.ý
 Wýýeýoýeý ýný ýiýtýnýeýlýaýnýný ýOýLý ýsýhýýeý ýsýaýhýrýýgýrýoý
 ýeýdýrýeýuýlýtý,ýrýaýýýsýmýýýbý ýuýtý ýiýfýrýný ýMýaýaý2ý0ýý ýnýeýpýsýtýoý
 ýfýtýeýgýnýeýeý ýaýeýoý ýhý ýeýrýeý ýoýuýaýiýnýwýuýdýbý ýeýdýdý ýnýoýaýiýnýý ýhý ýeý
 ýoýsýfýýiýnýlý ýnýeýrýgýtý,ýaýtýcýlýtý ýný ýnýlýzý ýhý ýeýdýrýcýnýtýuýtýoý ýnýwýýhýOýLýý
 ýeýýeýeý.ýWýýeýtýeýaýsýmýtýoý ýsýtýaý ýoýeý ýný ýiýlý ýrý ýiýaývýtýaýeý,ýtýý ýaý ýoý
 ýeýuýýeýsýlýýýýýuý.ýNývýtýhýlýsý,ýýý ýuýtýbý ýmýhýsýzýdýtýaý ýnýeýaýhýeýeýtýoý
 ýoýsýsýoýlý ýoý ýeýeýuýtýdýwýtý ýhý ýaýgýnýlýzýtýoý ýfýwýmýnýaýdýgýrýsýdýeýtý ýaýrýaýcýaý
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 ýeýdýrýrýlýtýoýsýnýgýtývýtý ýkýwýdýtý ýhý ýiýaývýtýaýeýoý ýoýeý ýný ýiýlý ýnýlýdý:ý

- ýrý ýhýrý ýrýaý ýfýkýoýlýdýeýdýmýnýtýaýýiýgýgýnýeý
 ýiýfýrýnýýtýoý?ýAýeýtýeýeýaýeýsýoý ýnýwýeýgý ýrýdýtýoýaýlý ýeýdýbý ýoýeý ýný
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- ýnýeýeýgýný ýnýwýeýgý ýcýnýmýeý,ýwýaý ýsýtýeýgýnýeý ýaýeý ýiýýiýnýoý ýaýoýrýý
 ýnýwýeýgý ýrýaýiýný ýsý ýný ýiýsýmýnýtýoý?ýlý ýhýrý ýnýeýýeýtýbýaý

- yiȳhȳwȳmȳnȳoȳcȳpȳiȳgȳeȳdȳuȳeȳ,ȳlȳwȳrȳsȳiȳlȳdȳsȳeȳtȳuȳ
ȳfȳtȳsȳsȳaȳdȳmȳnȳdȳmȳnȳtȳnȳ ȳwȳeȳsȳiȳ ȳnȳ ȳrȳdȳcȳiȳnȳ
3. ȳrȳ ȳaȳtȳcȳpȳtȳrȳ ȳeȳhȳdȳ ȳsȳdȳtȳ ȳnȳlȳdȳ ȳoȳeȳ ȳnȳdȳsȳgȳiȳgȳaȳdȳdȳvȳlȳpȳnȳ ȳoȳtȳnȳ
ȳnȳ ȳeȳrȳiȳgȳeȳpȳcȳaȳlȳ ȳoȳuȳiȳgȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳȳ ȳiȳeȳiȳoȳdȳȳHȳwȳiȳ ȳhȳ ȳhȳiȳeȳoȳ
ȳeȳhȳdȳ ȳnȳlȳeȳcȳdȳbȳ ȳeȳdȳrȳrȳlȳtȳoȳsȳ
 4. ȳsȳtȳeȳiȳsȳrȳcȳiȳnȳlȳdȳsȳgȳ ȳfȳdȳsȳaȳcȳ ȳeȳrȳiȳgȳiȳpȳtȳ ȳeȳdȳrȳsȳnȳiȳiȳeȳ
ȳeȳdȳrȳaȳpȳoȳrȳaȳeȳaȳdȳgȳnȳeȳ-ȳiȳaȳgȳeȳaȳeȳȳlȳ ȳnȳeȳfȳrȳ ȳaȳeȳtȳ ȳsȳeȳtȳiȳ
ȳiȳfȳrȳnȳ ȳrȳoȳiȳiȳsȳaȳcȳrȳeȳ ȳȳwȳmȳnȳaȳdȳmȳnȳdȳpȳnȳiȳgȳoȳ ȳaȳȳnȳ ȳeȳdȳ ȳoȳ
ȳiȳeȳiȳoȳdȳaȳdȳiȳpȳoȳeȳ ȳuȳlȳtȳ ȳfȳlȳfȳȳWȳoȳmȳkȳsȳtȳeȳeȳfȳrȳ ȳoȳfȳcȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳȳ
ȳnȳiȳeȳoȳsȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳaȳdȳtȳeȳrȳcȳnȳeȳnȳ,ȳiȳtȳrȳsȳsȳaȳdȳrȳgȳtȳ ȳnȳoȳpȳoȳuȳtȳoȳ ȳnȳ
ȳiȳsȳmȳnȳtȳoȳ ȳfȳcȳnȳeȳtȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳnȳrȳbȳtȳȳWȳoȳcȳeȳtȳsȳ ȳwȳsȳaȳdȳuȳeȳ
ȳhȳnȳeȳsȳoȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳtȳoȳ ȳoȳ ȳwȳrȳnȳsȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳnȳaȳdȳdȳsȳeȳiȳaȳiȳnȳ
 5. lȳ ȳnȳeȳfȳrȳ ȳaȳeȳtȳ ȳsȳeȳtȳiȳ ȳiȳfȳrȳnȳ ȳrȳoȳiȳiȳsȳaȳcȳrȳeȳ
ȳȳwȳmȳnȳaȳdȳmȳnȳdȳpȳnȳiȳgȳoȳ ȳaȳȳnȳ ȳeȳdȳ ȳoȳ ȳiȳeȳiȳoȳdȳaȳdȳiȳpȳoȳeȳ ȳuȳlȳtȳ
ȳfȳlȳfȳȳWȳoȳmȳkȳsȳtȳeȳeȳfȳrȳ ȳoȳfȳcȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳȳ
ȳnȳiȳeȳoȳsȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳaȳdȳtȳeȳrȳcȳnȳeȳnȳ,ȳiȳtȳrȳsȳsȳaȳdȳrȳgȳtȳ ȳnȳoȳpȳoȳuȳtȳoȳ ȳnȳ
ȳiȳsȳmȳnȳtȳoȳ ȳfȳcȳnȳeȳtȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳnȳrȳbȳtȳȳWȳoȳcȳeȳtȳsȳ ȳwȳsȳaȳdȳuȳeȳ
ȳhȳnȳeȳsȳoȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳtȳoȳ ȳoȳ ȳwȳrȳnȳsȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳnȳaȳdȳdȳsȳeȳiȳaȳiȳnȳ
 6. Wȳoȳmȳkȳsȳtȳeȳeȳfȳrȳ ȳoȳfȳcȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳȳ
ȳnȳiȳeȳoȳsȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳaȳdȳtȳeȳrȳcȳnȳeȳnȳ,ȳiȳtȳrȳsȳsȳaȳdȳrȳgȳtȳ ȳnȳoȳpȳoȳuȳtȳoȳ ȳnȳ
ȳiȳsȳmȳnȳtȳoȳ ȳfȳcȳnȳeȳtȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳnȳrȳbȳtȳȳWȳoȳcȳeȳtȳsȳ ȳwȳsȳaȳdȳuȳeȳ
ȳhȳnȳeȳsȳoȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳtȳoȳ ȳoȳ ȳwȳrȳnȳsȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳnȳaȳdȳdȳsȳeȳiȳaȳiȳnȳ
 7. Wȳoȳcȳeȳtȳsȳ ȳwȳsȳaȳdȳuȳeȳ ȳhȳnȳeȳsȳoȳ ȳoȳmȳnȳcȳtȳoȳ ȳoȳ ȳwȳrȳnȳsȳ
ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳnȳaȳdȳdȳsȳeȳiȳaȳiȳnȳ
 8. ȳvȳnȳiȳ ȳhȳ ȳaȳeȳoȳ ȳpȳnȳeȳuȳaȳiȳnȳlȳrȳsȳuȳcȳsȳ ȳeȳsȳbȳeȳlȳaȳnȳnȳ
ȳbȳeȳtȳ,ȳwȳkȳsȳaȳdȳoȳhȳrȳoȳlȳnȳ ȳeȳoȳrȳeȳ,ȳwȳaȳ ȳrȳpȳrȳiȳnȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳ ȳrȳ ȳwȳrȳ
ȳfȳtȳeȳ ȳnȳ ȳaȳeȳtȳeȳrȳqȳiȳiȳeȳbȳsȳcȳsȳiȳlȳ ȳoȳuȳeȳtȳeȳȳlȳ ȳhȳrȳ ȳ
ȳeȳdȳrȳdȳfȳeȳeȳtȳaȳ ȳnȳaȳcȳsȳ ȳnȳ ȳoȳtȳoȳ;ȳiȳ ȳhȳ ȳoȳeȳ ȳfȳcȳoȳcȳȳȳ
 9. lȳ ȳhȳrȳ ȳ ȳeȳdȳrȳdȳfȳeȳeȳtȳaȳ ȳnȳaȳcȳsȳ ȳnȳ ȳoȳtȳoȳ;ȳiȳ ȳhȳ ȳoȳeȳ ȳfȳcȳoȳcȳȳȳ

ȳTȳeȳpȳiȳaȳȳȳaȳeȳ ȳrȳuȳdȳwȳiȳhȳgȳnȳeȳ ȳeȳaȳiȳnȳ ȳeȳdȳtȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳeȳ ȳnȳlȳdȳȳ
Tȳeȳpȳiȳaȳȳȳaȳeȳ ȳrȳuȳdȳwȳiȳhȳgȳnȳeȳ ȳeȳaȳiȳnȳ ȳeȳdȳtȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳiȳeȳ ȳnȳlȳdȳȳ

1. ȳoȳtȳnȳ ȳaȳcȳsȳiȳlȳ ȳaȳgȳaȳeȳ ȳoȳaȳ ȳeȳeȳaȳcȳ;ȳiȳdȳgȳnȳuȳ ȳnȳwȳeȳgȳ;ȳpȳoȳuȳtȳoȳ
ȳnȳ ȳiȳsȳmȳnȳtȳoȳ;ȳgȳnȳeȳ ȳiȳaȳgȳeȳaȳeȳ ȳeȳdȳ;ȳrȳpȳcȳaȳiȳgȳ ȳuȳmȳnȳiȳgȳ
ȳoȳuȳeȳtȳnȳ ȳnȳ ȳtȳrȳnȳ,ȳsȳaȳiȳgȳiȳfȳrȳaȳiȳnȳaȳdȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳbȳ ȳnȳ ȳoȳ ȳoȳeȳȳ
2. ȳiȳeȳaȳaȳlȳbȳlȳtȳ ȳdȳeȳ ȳiȳeȳfȳmȳnȳ ȳfȳwȳmȳnȳrȳsȳlȳ ȳrȳmȳiȳeȳuȳtȳbȳeȳgȳnȳeȳ
ȳeȳaȳiȳnȳȳȳCȳsȳ ȳnȳ ȳbȳlȳtȳ ȳoȳpȳȳȳ
3. Cȳsȳ ȳnȳ ȳbȳlȳtȳ ȳoȳpȳȳȳ
4. ȳrȳaȳiȳnȳoȳ ȳsȳfȳȳsȳaȳeȳ ȳoȳtȳiȳuȳiȳgȳtȳ ȳoȳfȳdȳnȳeȳbȳiȳdȳnȳ;ȳPȳoȳiȳiȳnȳoȳ ȳrȳiȳiȳgȳ
ȳeȳoȳrȳeȳsȳpȳoȳtȳaȳdȳsȳiȳlȳuȳgȳaȳaȳiȳnȳ
5. Pȳoȳiȳiȳnȳoȳ ȳrȳiȳiȳgȳ ȳeȳoȳrȳeȳsȳpȳoȳtȳaȳdȳdȳsȳiȳlȳuȳgȳaȳaȳiȳnȳ
6. ȳcȳlȳ ȳnȳ ȳtȳlȳtȳ ȳfȳoȳeȳaȳiȳnȳ;ȳOȳnȳrȳhȳpȳaȳdȳmȳnȳgȳmȳnȳ
ȳfȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳaȳdȳiȳfȳrȳaȳiȳnȳcȳnȳrȳsȳ
7. Oȳnȳrȳhȳpȳaȳdȳmȳnȳgȳmȳnȳ ȳfȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳaȳdȳiȳfȳrȳaȳiȳnȳcȳnȳrȳsȳ
8. ȳrȳvȳsȳoȳ ȳfȳcȳiȳdȳeȳdȳrȳȳȳcȳrȳ ȳuȳpȳrȳ;ȳAȳaȳlȳbȳlȳtȳ ȳfȳtȳcȳnȳlȳgȳ
ȳaȳdȳaȳeȳaȳdȳiȳfȳaȳtȳuȳtȳrȳȳ
9. Aȳaȳlȳbȳlȳtȳ ȳfȳtȳcȳnȳlȳgȳ ȳaȳdȳaȳeȳaȳdȳiȳfȳaȳtȳuȳtȳrȳȳ

ȳTȳlȳcȳnȳrȳsȳoȳfȳrȳaȳnȳtȳrȳlȳpȳaȳfȳrȳ ȳoȳ ȳrȳmȳtȳnȳ ȳpȳnȳlȳaȳnȳnȳ
ȳoȳmȳnȳtȳeȳ.ȳTȳeȳtȳaȳsȳoȳmȳtȳoȳ ȳfȳeȳiȳtȳnȳ ȳCȳ ȳcȳeȳsȳpȳiȳtȳ ȳnȳsȳlȳcȳeȳ ȳoȳnȳrȳeȳ
ȳrȳuȳdȳtȳeȳwȳrȳdȳiȳtȳ ȳnȳwȳeȳgȳ ȳuȳsȳoȳ ȳlȳbȳlȳkȳoȳlȳdȳeȳnȳtȳoȳkȳ ȳaȳ ȳeȳoȳeȳtȳeȳfȳcȳsȳoȳ
ȳeȳeȳtȳUȳ ȳrȳjȳcȳsȳiȳ ȳfȳiȳaȳ ȳnȳrȳaȳeȳ ȳnȳaȳeȳeȳtȳoȳ ȳaȳgȳtȳbȳnȳfȳcȳaȳiȳsȳeȳpȳcȳaȳlȳ ȳoȳeȳ
ȳsȳeȳvȳsȳgȳdȳiȳ ȳhȳsȳ ȳnȳwȳeȳgȳ ȳeȳwȳrȳsȳ ȳhȳsȳiȳvȳlȳeȳeȳtȳwȳuȳdȳsȳrȳeȳtȳ ȳeȳlȳȳȳrȳlȳvȳnȳ
ȳnȳwȳeȳgȳ ȳeȳtȳiȳiȳgȳtȳ ȳeȳ ȳrȳaȳ ȳfȳsȳsȳaȳnȳbȳeȳdȳvȳlȳpȳeȳtȳsȳcȳ
ȳsȳeȳpȳoȳmȳnȳ,ȳeȳuȳaȳiȳnȳ ȳeȳdȳrȳaȳdȳhȳaȳtȳȳ

Týlŷcŷnŷrŷsŷoŷŷŷrŷaŷnŷtŷrŷlŷpŷaŷŷŷrŷ ŷoŷ ŷŷŷmŷtŷnŷ ŷpŷnŷlŷaŷnŷnŷ
 ŷoŷmŷnŷtŷeŷ.ŷTŷeŷtŷaŷsŷoŷmŷtŷoŷ ŷŷeŷiŷtŷnŷ ŷCŷ ŷcŷeŷsŷpŷiŷtŷ ŷnŷsŷlŷcŷeŷ ŷoŷnŷŷŷeŷ
 ŷŷŷuŷdŷtŷeŷwŷŷrŷdŷiŷtŷ ŷnŷwŷeŷgŷ ŷuŷsŷoŷ ŷlŷbŷlŷkŷoŷlŷdŷeŷnŷtŷoŷkŷ ŷaŷ ŷeŷoŷeŷtŷeŷŷcŷsŷoŷ
 ŷeŷeŷtŷUŷ ŷŷŷjŷcŷsŷiŷ ŷŷiŷŷaŷ ŷnŷŷŷaŷeŷ ŷnŷaŷeŷeŷtŷoŷ ŷaŷgŷtŷbŷnŷŷcŷaŷiŷsŷeŷpŷcŷaŷlŷ ŷoŷeŷ
 ŷsŷeŷvŷsŷgŷdŷiŷ ŷhŷsŷ ŷnŷwŷeŷgŷ ŷeŷwŷŷŷsŷ ŷhŷsŷiŷvŷlŷeŷeŷtŷwŷuŷdŷsŷŷŷeŷtŷ ŷeŷlŷŷŷŷŷlŷvŷnŷ
 ŷnŷwŷeŷgŷ ŷeŷtŷiŷiŷgŷtŷ ŷeŷ ŷŷŷaŷ ŷŷŷsŷŷaŷnŷbŷeŷdŷvŷlŷpŷeŷtŷsŷcŷ
 ŷsŷeŷpŷoŷmŷnŷ,ŷeŷuŷŷaŷiŷnŷ ŷeŷdŷŷŷaŷdŷhŷaŷtŷ.ŷ

ŷŷŷwŷnŷ ŷnŷtŷeŷWŷmŷnŷsŷNŷtŷeŷpŷŷŷŷeŷcŷsŷiŷ ŷoŷtŷ ŷŷiŷŷaŷ ŷoŷmŷsŷ(ŷ0ŷ4ŷ ŷaŷ ŷuŷgested a framework of gender analysis of telecentre evaluation methodology focusing on national policy and planning; selection of telecentre sites; ownership of telecentres; training of managers; services offered by telecentres; women as information creators and users/ non-users of telecentres. Analysts seek to explore ways to empower women through appropriate use of ICTs. Holmes suggests that if women are to be truly empowered, the process of practical, personal empowerment should ideally run parallel with a supported process of personal exploration (through access to appropriate equipment and materials, a supportive environment and relevant training.

Key issues of concern include constructing learning systems sensitive to women learners and their needs, style, pace, culture, interests and aspirations; constructing and managing learning systems linked to identifying and realizing women's development and empowerment priorities; shaping learning systems comprised of dynamically inter-connected diverse learning communities sharing information, culture and experience in women-owned repositories; creating learning systems engaged in gender-sensitive organization of learning. Technology applications empower women through efficient and effective access to previously intangible information (Nath 2001). Beardon (2006) documented pilot projects in Burundi, India and Uganda and suggested the need to constantly engage the human communication dimensions of ICTs especially for marginalized groups including women. Aji et al (2010) noted the central focus of capacity building of women to make choices in the social, political and economic spheres. Their constructs of empowerment theory include interpersonal, interactional and behavioural components.

Gigler (2004) and Grunfeld (2007) applied Amartya Sen's capability approach to determine whether ICT can play a role for empowerment of marginalized groups. While no direct and causal relationship could be established between ICTs and empowerment, a dynamic, multi-dimensional interrelationship between technology and the social context was revealed. A more proactive approach to gender mainstreaming within ICT policy would ensure equal and non-discriminatory access to ICT infrastructure and connectivity. This is an essential initiative to empower girls and women to participate in ICT use and application.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the African and Asian experience, the paper suggests frameworks for promoting development of open learning communities which promote gender equity and gender equality. There is ample evidence to suggest that telecentres can be upgraded into knowledge centres providing appropriate content generated, collated, used and disseminated by women. Such centres would have a key role to play in provision of open and distance learning, thus ushering a technology-mediated network of open learning communities. Reflection is needed on ownership of knowledge and creation of gender-disaggregated content within the context of local gender relations. Though technology can be an instrument of change, implications of open learning communities forming through face-to-face interaction and occupying our mindscapes should be emphasized as well in promoting gender equity and equality.

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